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FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0351
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS BELGRADE 000885

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/CARC, EUR/RUS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#) [SR](#)

SUBJECT: SERBIA UNLIKELY TO RECOGNIZE SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

REF: A) STATE 91894, B) BELGRADE 852

1. (U) Pol Chief delivered Ref A demarche to Damjan Krnjevic Miskovic, senior advisor to Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, on August 27, emphasizing the unacceptability of Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and its failure to abide by the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Miskovic said that the statement issued by the MFA on August 26 represented the entirety of Serbia's official position on the issue.

2. (U) MFA's unofficial translation of August 26 press statement:

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia is following the development of events in the Caucasus with concern. Republic of Serbia officials have continuously cautioned that the unilateral declaration of independence of [Serbia's southern province of] Kosovo and Metohija, as well as the recognition of this illegal act, could be characterized as a precedent and lead to the destabilization of other regions across the globe.

With regret it can be seen that such a prediction has been brought into being.

Official Belgrade respects international law and holds the principled position to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of internationally recognized states, starting with the Republic of Serbia.

(End MFA Press Statement)

3. (SBU) Acknowledging the awkward position in which Russia's actions have placed Serbia (Ref B), Miskovic said that Moscow had expressed understanding for Belgrade's "principled position" and had not explicitly requested that Serbia recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Miskovic was unable to say definitively what Serbia would do, as the issue was on hold while President Tadic and FM Jeremic were on vacation, but he noted that it would be difficult for his government to do anything that undercut its position on Kosovo or the priority it places on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

4. (SBU) Comment: While Serbia's foreign policy professionals understand that Moscow has severely undercut their Kosovo policy by recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the diplomatic nuances are lost on the Serbian public which simply views Russia's actions in the Caucasus as well-deserved payback for the west's "theft" of Kosovo. The MFA's "I-told-you-so" response, echoed by other government ministers in the press, is the best the GOS can muster as it scrambles to figure out how to cope with Russia's actions in the Caucasus. End comment.

MUNTER